

**Hybridity, Immigrant Identity and Ethnic Impersonation in
Karolina Waclawiak's *How to Get into the Twin Palms***

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Käsittelen pro gradu –tutkielmassani maahanmuuttajien kulttuurisen identiteetin muodostumista ja hybridisen identiteetin vaikutusta etniseen imitointiin Karolina Waclawiakin romaanissa *How to Get into the Twin Palms* (2012), jonka puolalais-amerikkalainen päähenkilö alkaa esittämään venäläistä päästäkseen sisään vain venäläisille tarkoitettuun yökerhoon.

Alati globalisoituvassa maailmassa maahanmuuttajien identiteetin tutkiminen on yhä tärkeämpi aihe, ja erityisesti etninen imitointi eri muodoissaan heijastelee hyvin monikulttuurisen identiteetin aiheuttamia ongelmia. Tarkoitukseni on tutkia monikulttuurista identiteettiä ja etnistä imitointia muun muassa Homi K. Bhabhan hybriditeettiteorian ja mimikointi-käsitteen kautta, joiden uskon selittävän miksi romaanin päähenkilö hylkää oman puolalais-amerikkalaisen kulttuuri-identiteettinsä ja alkaa tavoittelemaan venäläistä kulttuuri-identiteettiä. Käsittelen tutkielmassani myös urbaanin tilan vaikutusta henkilön kulttuuri-identiteetin muodostumiseen, sillä Waclawiakin romaanissa Los Angelesillä vaikuttaa olevan merkittävä rooli päähenkilön imitointiprosessissa.

Tutkielmani tavoitteena on löytää yhteys hybridisen identiteetin, urbaanin tilan ja etnisen imitoinnin välillä. Tutkielman teoriaosuudessa pyrin ensin määrittelemään mitä maahanmuuttajakirjallisuudella ylipäänsä tarkoitetaan, jonka jälkeen käsittelen sekä puolalaisten, että puolalais-amerikkalaisten maahanmuuttajien historiaa, sillä koen tämän olevan tärkeää selvittäessä romaanin päähenkilön motiiveja hänen käytökselleen. Tämän jälkeen esittelen Bhabhan hybriditeettiteorian, jonka jälkeen siirryn määrittelemään etnisen imitoinnin eri muotoja, sen historiallisia vaikutuksia, sekä Bhabhan mimikointi-käsitteen yhteyttä etniseen imitointiin. Teoriaosuuden lopuksi esittelen urbaanin tilan tutkimuksen peruskäsitteitä sekä niiden yhteyksiä yksilön identiteetin muovautumiseen. Teoriaosuutta seuraava analyysiosio on jaettu kolmeen aihepiiriin, joissa tutkin päähenkilön identiteetin muovautumista, hänen etnisen imitoinnin prosessiaan, sekä Los Angelesin roolia päähenkilön toiminnassa.

Tutkielma osoittaa, että hybridisellä identiteetillä ja sen aiheuttamalla juurettomuuden tunteella voi olla vaikutus siihen, että henkilö alkaa imitoimaan toisen etnisyyden piirteitä, ja että urbaani tila ympäristönä voi vaikuttaa yksilön identiteettiin.

Avainsanat: hybridity, immigrant identity, ethnic impersonation, mimicry

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1. Introduction

Immigration and the challenges that immigrants face in terms of adaptation into another culture and the development of their multicultural identity are important and relevant subjects to study especially in today's world, where immigration is increasing more than ever because of globalization (Li 2008, 1-2). When immigrants move from one culture to another, they have to learn to navigate between two or more cultures and find a balance between them in order to adapt to the society that they are part of. As a result of this, some theorists, such as Homi K. Bhabha, claim that immigrants can end up in an in-between stage between cultures (1994, 313), and that they develop hybrid cultural identities, which the act of mimicry, i.e. imitation of another culture's characteristics, is "an affect of" (1994, 172). Immigrant fiction provides a useful medium for examining the notion of hybrid cultural identity and the complexities of identity in general, and these themes are also present in Karolina Waclawiak's debut novel *How to Get into the Twin Palms* (2012).

Waclawiak's novel is especially intriguing in terms of cultural identity because it seems to challenge the conventions of traditional immigrant fiction, where the emphasis has been on "what it means to be uprooted, willingly or by force, from one's homeland as well as the problems of adjusting to an entirely new environment", by exploring its themes through ethnic impersonation (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014, 682). Anya, whose real name is actually Zosia, is the 25-year-old Polish-American protagonist of the novel, who appears to be suffering from some kind of identity loss or confusion because of her immigrant background. Instead of choosing to identify with either one or both of the cultures that she is a product of, Anya in fact chooses to imitate a Russian, despite having no familial ties to the Russians. The only connection that she has with the Russians is that she lives in a neighborhood in Los Angeles which is inhabited mostly by Russian and eastern European

immigrants, thus making the city an important part of her identity quest. It is this surprising choice of the protagonist to start impersonating the characteristics of another culture which make the novel an interesting piece to study in terms of immigrant identity, and my aim in this thesis is to find an explanation for Anya's behaviour through the concepts of *hybridity*, *mimicry* and *ethnic impersonation*, as well as by looking at the historical background of Polish-Americans and their settlement in the United States and its major cities, such as Los Angeles. This approach and the aforementioned concepts can help explain how immigrants develop their multicultural identity, and why an immigrant might as result of that want to impersonate, mimic, or pass as member of another ethnicity or culture.

Because the novel was published rather recently, it has not yet been studied extensively. However, Grazyna Kozaczka's review of Waclawiak's novel in *The Polish Review* convinced me that this novel could be worth analyzing in closer detail. It also revealed that Waclawiak's novel is actually a part of a long continuum of immigrant fiction that concentrates specifically on the theme of ethnic impersonation, and its setting is not, in fact, a novel concept in the field of immigrant literature: "It seems then that with her debut novel, *How to Get into the Twin Palms*, Karolina Waclawiak enters an interesting and well-established trend in American literature" (2014, 110). In general, immigrant fiction studies seem to have been concentrating on immigrant identity mostly from the perspective of hybridity, and therefore, my thesis will be an addition to the previous research on the topic with a special interest and focus placed on the concepts of ethnic impersonation and mimicry, of which there exist a few useful studies. In order to study the role of Los Angeles in the novel from the immigrants' perspective, I will also look at some works from the field of urban space studies in order to gain an understanding on the city's role in the immigrants' identity forming process.

The thesis is divided into two major chapters, which include the theory section of the thesis and the analysis of Waclawiak's *How to Get into the Twin Palms*. The following theory chapter will first concentrate on defining immigrant literature in general, for it is important to look at what kind of themes and issues are usually dealt with in immigrant fiction, and how Waclawiak's novel fits into this tradition. After that, a background on Polish-American immigrants and the historical connections between the Polish and the Russians will be provided, as both the historical connections of the two countries and the relationship between them play a crucial role in why Anya chooses to pass specifically as a Russian. After that, I will move on to defining the key theories that I will use in my analysis of Waclawiak's novel. These will be Bhabha's theory on cultural hybridity, the concept of ethnic impersonation and how Bhabha's theory on colonial mimicry might help explain the motivations behind such behaviour, and lastly, urban space studies and the role of Los Angeles as a place of immigration, for as a setting the city seems to carry an important symbolic meaning in the novel, and the multicultural neighborhood depicted in the novel appears to have an effect on Anya's cultural identity.

The analysis chapter that follows the theory chapter, will first provide the methods of my analysis, followed by a more detailed description of *How to Get into the Twin Palms* together with the author's comments on it, after which I will analyze Anya's immigrant identity and its complexities with the help of Bhabha's hybridity theory. Following that, I will concentrate on analyzing the theme of ethnic impersonation in the novel, with the help of Bhabha's theory on colonial mimicry and the notion of passing as a form of ethnic impersonation. After that, I will analyze the role of Los Angeles in the novel in relation to Anya's identity forming process. The final chapter of the thesis provides a summary of the results found in the analysis chapter, and will look what connections these findings have with

the current immigration debate and immigration studies.

2. Background and Theory

2.1 Immigrant Literature and Polish-American Immigrants in the United States

In this era of globalization, immigration has become an especially relevant subject to study, and by studying immigrant literature, we are also able to examine immigration both on a larger scale as a phenomenon in the society, as well as its specific impacts on an individual. Because immigration affects so many different aspects of life, immigrant literature studies draw from a vast array of different academic fields, such as psychology and social sciences. Therefore, when examining immigrant literature, it is necessary to look at what these fields of study have to say about immigrants' adaptation process into the society, if the purpose is to gain an understanding of what happens to a character's identity when they are going through the immigration process. These findings, even if achieved in the context of fictional settings, can be used in analyzing how immigrants in real life deal with these matters – not only because Waclawiak's novel draws from the author's personal experiences as an immigrant, but also because the analysis of the novel will demonstrate that fiction can be used as a tool to examine reality and the cultural models that literary texts are constructed from (Alber et al. 2011, 18-19).

Immigration as a phenomenon is not, of course, new to this age, although it has expanded rapidly in the recent decades because of globalization, which has made communication, exchange and movement between cultures easier than ever before (Li 2008, 2). One cannot also ignore the impact that political conflicts have had on the number of immigrants and refugees all over the world. It follows, then, that migration as a phenomenon has an increasingly important role in politics, economics, geography and culture, and that this has resulted in the "appearance of a new kind of writing, called literature of migration" (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014, 679-680). Immigrant literature as a term is generally used in

order to describe literature whose subject matter is immigration, although Pourjafari and Vahidpour (2014, 680) state, that even though "the description of the migration experience and the difficulties of adaptation play a primary role in this literature, actually, migrant literature can be very diverse, either thematically or structurally".

An important debate in the field of immigrant fiction studies is what qualities a work has to possess in order to be considered a piece of immigrant fiction (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014, 681). For example, Pourjafari and Vahidpour (2014, 681-682) claim, that not every work produced by a migrant author can be called immigrant literature, and that it is not enough for a work to be considered a piece of immigrant literature if the work simply expresses feelings of homesickness or nostalgia towards a culture. According to them, "the migrant artist does not merely recall the past with sentimental nostalgia. It should renew the past and recreate lost identities by a deep perception of an 'in between-space', the experience of hybridization" (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014, 690). This, they state, "can be a crucial point for the researchers who mistakenly believe that every work which is produced by a migrant author can be called a 'migrant work'" (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014, 682).

Pourjafari and Vahidpour also note, that recent research has found three general themes to be relevant in immigrant fiction: hybridity, ambivalence and adjustment, and abandonment and return (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014, 685-689). From this, we can establish that Karolina Waclawiak's *How to Get into the Twin Palms* falls firmly into the category of immigrant fiction: it is written by a Polish-American immigrant about a Polish-American immigrant, and its dominant themes are those claimed by Pourjafari and Vahidpour to be vital to immigrant literature. Also, Waclawiak's novel fits not only into the long tradition of American immigrant literature and immigrant literature about ethnic impersonation, but it is also a part of a long continuum of specifically Polish-American immigrant literature, of which there

exists a great number of studies that can be useful when examining the motivations behind Anya's desire to pass a Russian.

Polish-American immigrants and Polish-American immigrant literature have been the subject of many studies in the past, as have been immigrants and immigrant literature in general, although according to Jelena Sesnic (2007, 11), the "self-conscious interest in ethnicity as a methodological approach to the study of American literature" appeared only as late as in the 1970s. Since then, an interest in both immigrant literature and immigration as a phenomenon only seems to have increased, which is also what John J. Bukowczyk (1998, 4) predicted in the late 1990s, when he stated that "debates about identity and nationality, which have pervaded ethnic literature", would continue and come "to involve the meaning of ethnicity and citizenship, multiculturalism and "belonging" in contemporary American society". Sesnic (2007, 11) also mentions, that even though "the terms and conditions of becoming American have changed in the post-1965 American 'social scape'", the "co-optational fantasy of the immigration paradigm, as a master narrative of US nation-formation", is still strongly a part of the "American imaginary". This is also what Conzen and Gerber claim, for according to them, the incorporation of the foreign born into the politic and social fabric of the country has been a persistent theme of American history since mass immigration began in the United States, and from there on, "the dominant interpretation both in American historiography and nationalist ideology had been one of rapid and easy assimilation" (1992). This speaks for immigration being seen as a vital part of the historical narrative of the United States, and the increasing interest in studies on ethnicity and immigrant identity today tells about its importance in the present as well.

However, despite the importance that has been given to immigration in relation to the cultural history of the United States, it is important to note that attitudes towards immigrants

in the United States have also been conflicting in the past, and that this continues in the 21st century, which the debates on themes such as identity or "belonging" into American society seem to reflect. Alpana S. Knippling (1996, xii-xv) claims, that the negative attitudes towards immigrants are visible in the stereotypical representations of immigrants in popular culture and the media. Kevin Keogan also repeats this claim, and states, that the negative news stories about immigrants in the media are "indicative of how immigrants are framed through the time and space of different places" (2010, 46). However, these attitudes are not confined to just news stories about immigrants. For example, Polish-Americans in particular have been the subject of stereotyping and strongly demeaning jokes in American culture for a long time (Bukowczyk 2008, 112), which shows that demeaning attitudes towards immigrants are as strongly a part of the American culture as are immigrants in the narrative of the development of the United States.

Also, in a poll conducted in 1993, 59 percent of Americans considered immigration to have been a good thing for the country in the past, whilst in 1996 the number had decreased to only 20 percent (Knippling 1996, xiii). Even though Knippling refers to a poll that was conducted over 20 years ago, his explanation on why these negative attitudes occurred and increased seem apt even today. Knippling explains that the negative attitudes towards immigrants in the United States might be a result of "pessimism about the national economy, coupled with an impatience at the apparent ease with which immigrants can cross the U.S. border and take up minimum-wage jobs that most Americans would shun" (Knippling 1996, xiii). Together with these pessimistic attitudes also the immigrant population in the United States has increased over the years. According to Keogan, "US immigration is reaching historic proportions", as the percent of immigrants in the total US population had increased from about 11 percent, or 31 million people, in 2000 to about 12.5 percent, or 37.5 million, in

2006 (1, 2010). However, he also states, that "during the peak of the last great wave of immigration around the turn of the 20th century the total number of immigrants was much smaller, but the proportion foreign-born was higher, reaching nearly 15 percent" (Keogan 2010, 1). This would be in accordance with the notion that the higher the amount of immigrants in the society, the more there are negative attitudes towards them.

For example, Knippling claims that these negative attitudes were not novel to the brink of the 21st century, but have occurred since the beginning of immigration to the United States (1997, xiv). According to her, "the timeliness of a national debate about U.S. immigration policy should not blind us to the fact that demeaning representations of immigrants in popular culture have existed since at least the mid-nineteenth century" (1996, xiv). As an example, Knippling compares the demeaning depictions of Chinese and Mexican immigrants in the media in the 1990s with E.L. Doctorow's representations of Italian and eastern European immigrants in his novel *Ragtime* (1975), which he claims shows immigrants in the early 20th century as "a kind of infestation or plague invading the sacrosanct shores of America", much like the Chinese and Mexican immigrants in late 20th century media (1996, xiv). In *Ragtime*, Knippling argues, Italian and eastern European immigrants were seen as filthy and illiterate people who had to be tagged, bathed and renamed on their arrival to Ellis Island, and that "by delving into the stockpile of racist immigrant imagery, Doctorow shows it for what it is: and exploitative strategy for the elite to maintain both cultural superiority and economic monopoly" (1996, xiv). Knippling continues:

What this discussion of historical-literary representations of immigration should suggest so far is a picture of a society increasingly driven toward homogeneity, continuously setting itself on the track of socioeconomic betterment, even as it is founded on the labor of others perhaps less privileged but themselves more or less aligned to the same track. In this sense, the United States is always caught in the process of remaking itself, although what is being remade is at once abstract and concrete" (1996, xv).

This drive towards homogeneity is perhaps best described in the famous "melting pot" metaphor of American society: the ideal where different cultures start melting together, and create a homogeneous American society. Should this assimilation into American society not fully happen, then, an immigrant might be started to be seen as the invading Other, who are not wanted in American society unless they agree to do the low-end jobs that most Americans would avoid, and even if they did, they might end up being seen as the filthy and illiterate people described in Doctorow's *Ragtime*.

Where does this leave Polish-American immigrants and their status in the American society then, and what can Polish-American immigrant literature tell about the past and the present of the Polish? The notoriously demeaning jokes about the Polish in American society certainly would suggest that the attitudes towards the Polish in the United States are problematic, much as the history of the Polish in general. According to Dawn B. Sova (1996, 319), "Polish émigré literature is rooted in the experiences of the fiercely independent and nationalistic Polish people who, in various periods of history, have experienced both a flourishing of culture and the complete obliteration of their nation". She continues, that even though Polish-language literature developed and flourished by the mid-fifteenth century, Polish literature has also been affected by centuries of unrest and severe threats to national identity, making Polish literature a literature of exiles, "even among those writers who have physically remained in their homeland" (Sova 1996, 319). However, Sova (1996, 319) also states, that the "strong national spirit" helped the Polish and their literature to sustain these difficult times.

The Polish have had to fight for their right to their own language, literature, and land in three different periods in the country's history (Sova 1996, 319-320). In 1772, large parts of Poland were overtaken by Austria, Russia and Prussia, which resulted in a constitution

which forbade the Polish from resurging Polish nationalism (Sova 1996, 321). In 1792 the Polish army attempted to overthrow the conquerors, but failed to do so, and instead ended up having Russia and Prussia annexing two thirds of their territory. This, then, resulted in 1794 in a revolutionary war which attempted to regain the lost territories, but again, the Polish were unsuccessful in this attempt. As a result, a large number of Polish revolutionaries were massacred, and a third partitioning of the country began, this time Russia taking over half of the territory, and Prussia and Austria each taking one-quarter of Polish lands. (Sova 1996, 321). What resulted from these events were 125 years of oppression, where the Polish lived as exiles in their own land, trying to preserve their culture despite the Russians' attempts to eliminate Polish national identity by, for example, making Russian the language of education, and limiting the activities of the Roman Catholic Church (Sova 1996, 321). It was not until 1918 that the Polish gained the right to self-determination, and formed a provisional government (Sova 1996, 321). And yet in 1939, Poland was again invaded, this time by the Germans, and later the Soviet Union posed another threat to the country (Sova 1996, 322).

Thus, the history of the Polish has been tumultuous, but unlike one might perhaps expect, Polish literature and culture actually flourished during this time, resulting in various Polish literary movements (Sova 1996, 321). And when the second wave of Polish émigré writers entered the United States after the second World War, they carried this history with them (Sova 1996, 323). However, despite the strong nationalism of the Polish, the notion of being Polish, or a Polish-American, was and continues to be a complex one. According to Bukowczyk, the migration waves that have come from Poland to the United States between the mid-1800s and the present have created an American Polonia, which is divided by "region of origin, class, immigrant generation, education, and life experience" (2011, 187). Thus, Bukowczyk (2011, 187) poses the question of what do all these different groups of people

called the Poles have in common, and what is it exactly that makes someone a Polish-American (2011, 188). Bukowczyk (2011, 189) attempts to find the answer in examining concepts such as ethnic and national identity. In his words:

People imagine communities, and as Benedict Anderson has argued, they also imagine peoplehood and, from that idea, nations. But ethnic communities, anthropologist Fredrik Barth has argued, are defined less by who is a member than by who is not, that is to say, by where and how groups draw their boundaries (Bukowczyk 2011, 189).

This kind of thinking, though, Bukowczyk argues,

has lain the man-trap of all nationalisms: the more impermeable the boundaries, the more demanding the entry requirements, the more cohesive but also the more coercive the identity or the group. Thus, how can one become a "Pole" or "Polish American"? How can one shed the identity and leave the group? And, of course, who can never be a "true Pole"? Who is left out?" (2011, 189).

These questions are some of the most central themes of Waclawiak's novel, in which both the problematic past of the Polish people, as well as the complex hybrid identity of Polish-Americans, appear to contribute to Anya's decision to pass as a Russian. Thus, her behaviour might be seen as a way for her to "shed the identity and leave the group" (Bukowczyk 2011, 189), but also as a form of colonial mimicry, where the relationship between the Russians and the Polish play an important role. I will return to the concept of mimicry in a later subchapter, but before that I will explore the notions of identity and hybridity in the following subchapter.

2.2 Hybridity and Immigrant Identity

Before concentrating on the concept of hybridity in relation to immigrants' cultural identity, it is essential to first briefly define what identity itself is, or how it can be perceived in different fields of study. According to Cherise Smith (2011, 8), the various theories that aim to define identity and its origin assume that identity is either a natural, innate quality of a person, or a

socially and culturally constructed entity. Common to both of these schools of thought is the question of whether identity of a person is changeable, and whether people themselves can change their identity (Smith 2011, 8). Poststructuralist theorists, such as Derrida, Foucault and Althusser, believe that identity is formed by discourse and culture (Smith 2011, 8). In the light of Waclawiak's novel, the poststructuralist view on identity seems the most fitting, but as Stuart Hall notes, "the notion of identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think" (1990, 222).

According to Hall (1996, 19), identity entered into "the modern mind" as a means for the individual to find escape from uncertainty. Some theorists, such as Hall and Chris Weedon, question Althusser's notions of identity as determined by social and cultural rules, despite believing it to be a socially and culturally constructed entity. They believe, that identity is not a fixed entity, but is in fact ever-changing, and "will change according to the context in which it is used" (Weedon 2004, 6). This is in accordance with Bhabha's belief, that people cannot "be addressed as colossal, undifferentiated collectives of class, race, gender or nation", for people "always exist as a multiple form of identification, waiting to be created and constructed" (Rutherford 1990, 220). Theorists such as Judith Butler also believe, that "identity is a 'series of repetitive acts' and socially mandated behaviors that an individual is forced to perform continually in order to take on and maintain a particular identity" (Smith 2011, 8). This is also what Bhabha claims:

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements - the stubborn chunks, as the basis of cultural identifications. What is at issue is the performative nature of those differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually -- remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference - be it class, gender or race (1994, 313).

In *How to Get into the Twin Palms*, Anya's identity seems to be formed by the discourse and cultures that surrounds her, but her identity is also subject to change, and she at least appears

be able to change it herself by engaging in different kind of performances, such as in ethnic impersonation. But whether she actually manages to do that, is another question.

Despite the theoretical debates and complexities relating to the notion of identity in cultural criticism, attempts have been made in other fields of study, such as in psychology, to define different aspects of identity. These attempts have resulted in the emergence of terms such as *national* and *ethnic identity*, also referred to by Bukowczyk on his discussion on Polish-American identity, and together they form the notion of *cultural identity*. According to Berry et. al. (2006, 3), these terms were adopted from developmental psychology and social psychology. The term *ethnic identity* refers to "the cultural and psychological changes that result from the contact between cultural groups, including the attitudes that are generated", whereas *national identity* refers to the "sense of attachment a person has to a particular group, including beliefs and feeling linking him or her to these groups" (Berry et. al. 2006, 3). A person's identity can also be *bicultural*, which means that one's identity is "based on a balancing or blending of the two cultures" (2006, 5). According to Berry et. al. (2006, 5), "young people who come to a new country as children, or who are born to immigrants, face the challenge of developing a cultural identity based on both their family's culture of origin and the culture of the society in which they reside". How they develop their identity, depends on their *acculturation* attitudes (Berry et. al. 2006, 5), which refers to "the changes that take place following intercultural contact" (Berry et. al. 2006, 71). According to Berry et. al. (2006, 71), "cultural identity can be thought of as an aspect of acculturation that focuses on immigrants' sense of self rather than their behaviors and attitudes following immigration. Conceptually, it includes both ethnic identity, and national identity". If, then, an immigrant is "unable to resolve the cultural identity issues that they face, they may exhibit *identity diffusion*" (2006, 5), which results in immigrants feeling "uncertain about their place in

society, perhaps wanting to be part of the larger society but lacking the skills and ability to make contacts". Identity diffusion is "characterized by a lack of commitment to a direction or purpose in their lives", as well as social isolation (Berry et. al. 2006, 104). This would suggest, that Anya in *How to Get into the Twin Palms* is suffering from it.

The term *hybridity* has numerous different meanings depending on the field that it is used in. In general, the term carries a meaning that simply refers to mixture, and therefore, it can be applied to almost any field of subject (Kraidy 2005, 1). In the context of cultural criticism, however, the term hybridity, or hybrid cultural identity, is used to refer to a mixture of culture, or different aspects of it, such as race, language and ethnicity (Kraidy 2005, 1). Some theorists, such as Kraidy, prefer to use it in the wider sense of culture, while others use the term to refer to racial intermixture exclusively (Kraidy 2005, 1). What is common to all of these different schools of thought, however, is that the concept of hybridity "has now acquired the status of a common-sense term, not only in academia but also in the culture more generally" (Brah and Coombes 2000, 1).

Originally the term was used in the field of biology, and it is by some believed to be brought into the context of language and culture by Homi K. Bhabha, who introduced the term in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), which is a collection of his essays on culture from a postcolonial viewpoint (Kraidy 2005, ix). Postcolonial theory emerged during the late 1980s, and according to Archana Gupta (2012, 2), it is a "pro-active movement against any kind of injustice, any kind of depravity and distinction", which "developed the literature which has given us a platform to view the relationship between the western and non-western countries from a different point of view". Therefore, as Bhabha's theory on cultural hybridity is set in the postcolonial context, it draws from the postcolonial discussion on power, agency, the colonizer and the colonized, and makes use of concepts such as liminality in addition to

hybridity and mimicry. Hybridity is not, therefore, used by Bhabha simply as a reference to mixture, but instead, it is a complex theory that addresses many aspects of society, colonialism and immigration.

Since hybridity and mimicry are the most relevant concepts to explore in relation to Waclawiak's novel, I will only concentrate on these aspects in his theory in more detail. However, as the concept of *liminality* is so closely linked with hybridity in Bhabha's theory, and possibly has some relevance to Waclawiak's novel, it needs to be mentioned. When Bhabha gives his broader definition on hybridity he refers to the in-between stage where immigrants are. This in-between stage, in its most basic sense, is what is meant by the term liminality – immigrants live in between two cultures, and their identities are in the middle of a forming process. In Bhabha's words:

The stairwell as a liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (1994, 5).

For Bhabha, hybridity is a way to avoid "that very simplistic polarity between the ruler and the ruled" (Rutherford 1990, 220). In his words:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of dominating through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination (1994, 159).

According to Haj Yazdiha, "Bhabha argued that colonizers and the colonized are mutually dependent in constructing a shared culture", and that his aim was "to create a new language and mode of describing the identity of Selves and Others" (2010, 31-32). Yazdiha also states,

that "among postcolonial theorists, there is a wide consensus that hybridity arose out of the culturally internalized interactions between "colonizers" and "the colonized" and the dichotomous formation of these identities" (2010, 31). Modern postcolonial studies also believe hybridity to provide a way out of binary thinking, and to "allow the inscription of the agency of the subaltern, and even permit a restructuring and destabilizing of power" (Prabhu 2007, 1). For example, Yazdiha claims, that "by examining how the hybrid can deconstruct boundaries within race, language and nation", hybridity can "empower marginalized collectives and deconstruct bounded labels, which are used in the service of subordination" (2010, 36). Thus, hybridity "can be seen not as a means of division or sorting out the various histories and diverse narratives to individualize identities, but rather a means of reimagining an interconnected collective" (Yazdiha 2010, 36).

However, some critics, including Anjali Prabhu, are skeptical of the view that hybridity could restructure and destabilize power, even though they see the usefulness and potential of the hybridity theory (Prabhu 2007, 1). For example, Prabhu suggests that we should make a division between hybridity as a theoretical concept and a political stance, and hybridity as a social reality with historical specificity (2007, 2). In her opinion, "the most productive theories of hybridity are those that effectively balance the task of inscribing a functional-instrumental version of the relation between culture and society with that of enabling the more utopian/collective image of society" (2007, 2). Some theorists, on the other hand, even consider hybridity to be "basically useless", which Kraidy claims shows signs of weaknesses in the hybridity theory, and he continues by stating that if hybridity is used only as a wide umbrella term, its usefulness might be questioned (2005, x). This would support Prabhu's view that we should distinguish between theoretical hybridity and hybridity as a social reality, and intertwine them in theoretical discussion. However, even Bhabha himself

notes that hybridity "is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures" (1994, 162). Instead, hybridity could be seen as a way to reverse the effects of colonial disavowal, "so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha 1994, 162).

The notion of hybrid cultural identity can be useful in analyzing Anya's motives for ethnic impersonation, for Anya seems to be suffering from identity diffusion, and is caught in the in-between stage between different cultural identities. Thus, her act of impersonating a Russian, as well as a Polish and an American identity when she so wishes, could be seen as a way for her to shift forces of colonial power in her environment through her hybrid cultural identity. In the next subchapter I will concentrate on the aspects of mimicry and ethnic impersonation in more detail.

2.3 Ethnic Impersonation and Mimicry

According to Kozaczka, Karolina Wacławiak's *How to Get into the Twin Palms* falls into the long tradition of immigrant literature specifically dealing with the theme of ethnic impersonation (2014, 110). Even its peculiar setting, where a Polish immigrant starts to impersonate a Russian in order to pass as one, is not a novelty in immigrant literature - it has been done before in Manuela Gretkowska's novel *My Zdies Emigranty*, where a Polish narrator living in Paris starts to introduce herself as a Russian (Kozaczka 2014, 110). Nor is the theme of ethnic impersonation new in relation to other ethnicities either. Many writers in the past have had their characters acquire a new identity through ethnic impersonation, and the phenomenon has been researched especially in relation to African American fiction, as well as in Asian American fiction and autobiographical literature.

According to Steven J. Belluscio, "American literary history traces a continual

narrative of the relationship between dominant and marginal groups in colonial America and the United States", and that the passing narrative "involves an extreme example of crossing the boundary that separates dominant and marginal cultural, racial, and/or ethnic groups – usually with the purpose of 'shed[ding] the identity of an oppressed group to gain access to social and economic opportunities" (2006, 1). This phenomenon is perhaps most well-known to have taken place between black and white people in the form of racial passing. According to Cherise Smith, racial passing is a form of ethnic impersonation and identity transformation which "has occurred in the American context for at least as long as people of African descent have had sexual unions with those of European descent and the latter have oppressed the former" (2011, 11). Traditionally, racial passing has been understood to refer to a situation where people who are legally black but possess a fair complexion choose to live as white (Smith 2011, 11-12). According to Smith, this kind of passing is grounded in the assumptions that whiteness and blackness are stable and impenetrable categories, and that an individual in one category cannot possibly fit in the other "because of the fixity of ethnic signifiers, including but not limited to culture and phenotype" (Smith 2011, 12). The goal of passing is a "wholesale shift in identity", and like Belluscio, Smith claims that individuals pass in order to assume privileges that are enjoyed by the members of the majority culture (2011, 12). Therefore, Smith argues (2011, 12), it is no wonder that also class, gender, religious and sexual passing are prevalent ways of identity transformation in the American context.

An important part of the history of ethnic impersonation is the concept of *blackface minstrelsy*, which is an American tradition where white performers dress up for entertainment purposes by painting their skin black with paint (Smith 2011, 13). As a phenomenon, blackface minstrelsy started around the mid-nineteenth century, and is a later invention than white minstrelsy (Smith 2011, 13). Blackface minstrelsy depended on stereotypes and

exaggerated notions of blackness, where blackness was represented as debased, threatening, humble and virile (Smith 2011, 13). Through minstrelsy, Smith argues, performers and audiences were able to define their own masculinity, class identity, and racial superiority (2011, 13). Laura Browder, as well, claims (2000, 48), that performances like this "helped audiences to understand who would be considered American (the audience) and who would fall into another category (the performers)", which thus helped define what it is to be an American, and "created a white identity in opposition to a range of other identities".

According to Browder, these nineteenth-century theatrical performances also "made the representation of ethnicity accessible to a wide public and tied the performance of Americanness to ethnic performances" (2000, 47). Thus, Browder continues, "from the 1830s to the 1890s, people developed a new vocabulary of race, embedded in commercial performance", and as a result of urbanization and the change in the relationships between ethnic groups in America, ethnicity and ethnic impersonation began attaining the status of entertainment (2000, 47-48). The popularity of racial passing as a phenomenon is seen to have ended in the 1960s by the civil rights movement and by writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright, who no longer dealt with ethnic passing in their writings (Moynihan 2010, 2). However, as Sinéad Moynihan notes (2010, 4-6), the tradition seems to be well alive in fiction and mainstream American culture even today, and she suggests its recent popularity could be related to the interest in multiculturalism and interracialism that was evoked in the 1990s. Moynihan's notion indeed seems accurate when looking at the recent occurrences in the United States where people of caucasian origin have been accused of having impersonated African-Americans and/or claiming biracial origin, such as in the case of the civil right movement activist Rachel Dolezal, as well as others. The fact that these events have occurred in the 21st century, and have stirred controversy and even anger in the

public, show that the issue of ethnic impersonation is still present and relevant in today's society, and that there are things that motivate people to impersonate. As Dolezal herself said in *The Guardian*, "The discussion's really about what it is to be human" (Yuhas, Jun 16, 2015). According to *The Guardian*, Dolezal "disputed accusations that she had deceived people about her identity, saying that the issue was 'a little more complex than me identifying as black or answering a question of are you black or white'" (Yuhas, Jun 16, 2015).

It is perhaps because of the minstrelsy tradition, and racial passing's prevalence especially among African Americans, that "critics have tended to locate literary passing exclusively in the works of African American writers" (Belluscio 2006 1-2). However, as noted before, ethnic impersonation as a phenomenon is not related to just African Americans, but to other ethnicities as well. For example, Tina Chen states (2005, 5), that "acts of impersonation have been critical in constructing and deconstructing what it means to be Asian American in the United States", and Monica Trieu notes this behaviour appearing among Chinese-Vietnamese immigrants living in the United States (2009, 97). Belluscio, on the other hand, has studied this phenomenon from the view-point of Jewish and Italian Americans, and suggests, that "critical apparatus of passing should also be applied to the literature of white ethnic groups who came to the shores of the United States, most numerous from the 1880s until the 1920s stemmed the tide of southern and eastern European immigration" (2006, 2). He claims, that during this period, "non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants found themselves in racially in-between subject positions from which they could escape only by adopting the social, religious, economic, and intellectual mores of the better-established white dominant culture" (2006, 2). Therefore, he argues that many of these first- and second-generation ethnics could in fact be claimed to have passed for white Anglo-Saxons in an attempt to "achieve occupational security and social acceptance" (2006,

2).

Therefore, even though Anya's passing is not a case of an ethnically non-caucasian person trying to pass as white, her identity transformation process can be claimed to be an act of ethnic impersonation. After all, Anya consciously transforms her appearance and behaviour to match those of the Russians, thus trying to abandon her Polish and American cultural identity by *performing* a Russian identity. It is also important to note, that in her childhood Anya also learned how to perform a Polish identity, as well as an American identity, which is what the immigrant camp she was sent to as a child in the United States also encouraged her to do.

The idea of performance becomes important when trying to analyze what exactly constitutes a culture, a race, or an identity. After all, what is race except a cultural invention, and what is culture if not a set of conventions performed and defined by people? Chen, for example, claims that impersonation can be seen as a "double construction of identity: a performance always involving the acting out of roles, the contestation of the performances that we both wish to participate in and would like to somehow disavow" (2005, 4). What is also evident, is that notions such as race and culture are developed out of multiple concepts in the society. For example, Moynihan (2010, 54) claims religion to be one factor which has "helped to produce 'race' as a category", and in *How to Get Into the Twin Palms*, religion is indeed an important part of Anya's identity, for her relationship with both Catholicism and Polishness troubles her. Smith (2011, 11) also claims, that the complexity in performances that deal with, for example, blackness, reside "at the crossroads where blackness meets gender, class and other identity positions", and concludes, that "blackness cannot be separated from race, class, religion, sexual orientation, or any other identification because each identity position shades, inflects and deepens others". Therefore, all the different identity categories

seem to be connected with each other, and as Smith suggests (2011, 12), these categories are not fixed, but individuals appear to be free to switch categories any time they want, and they can do this through passing. In Smith's words: "an individual may choose to jump ship and pass into another identity, thereby seizing the power to choose how she wants to represent her own cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, religious, and sexual identity" (Smith 2011, 12).

However, people such as Dolezal do not necessarily see themselves as performing an identity - she specifically claims that she does not "put on blackface as a performance" (Yuhas, 16 Jun, 2015). Therefore, to look at cultural identity or ethnic impersonation just as a performance is questionable, and Chen (2005, 6), in fact, suggests that we should actually talk about the politics of impersonation rather than assume that impersonation is somehow a false act – she believes that impersonation blurs the line between what is authentic and inauthentic, and insists on its genuineness. Chen, then, points out a division between imposture and impersonation. According to her:

imposture depends upon a particular belief in the power of the authentic. As such, deception of this kind requires a seamless performance; the object is to fool others, to 'pull one over' by convincing your audience (and maybe even yourself) of the rightness of your performance. Impersonation, on the other hand, challenges the notion of seamless performance; it is a paradoxical act whereby the notions of authenticity and originality are simultaneously paid homage to and challenged (2005, 7).

This proves us that Anya is in fact committing an act of ethnic impersonation – she is not acting seamlessly as a Russian, nor should she need to in order to pass. After all, passing is a form of ethnic impersonation, whereas imposture is not, and as will become clear, Anya is not involved in a seamless performance of Russianness.

The fact that Anya's transformation is not complete is also an important aspect of Homi K. Bhabha's theory on colonial mimicry, which might help explain the ulterior motives behind her behaviour, and further proves the idea that Anya truly is an ethnic impersonator.

Anya's attempt to pass as a Russian through the process of ethnic impersonation could be seen as an act of mimicry, and that this behaviour could be caused by Anya's hybrid cultural identity. This view is also supported by Bhabha, who claims that mimicry could be caused by hybridity (1994, 172). In Bhabha's words:

The metonymic strategy produces the signifier of colonial mimicry as the affect of hybridity - at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance, from the disciplined to the desiring. As the discriminated objects, the metonym of presence becomes the support of an authoritarian voyeurism, all the better to exhibit the eye of power. Then, as discrimination turns into the assertion of the hybrid, the insignia of authority becomes a mask, a mockery. After our experience of the native interrogation, it is difficult to agree entirely with Fanon that the psychic choice is to turn white or disappear.' There is the more ambivalent, third choice: camouflage, mimicry, black skins/white masks (1994, 172).

The term *mimicry* in postcolonial context refers simply to the imitation of the manners of the colonizers, although as Gupta (2012, 1) notes, "The concept of mimicry is not as simple as it seems at first instance, but a complex one." According to Kumar (2011, 119), Bhabha's analysis of mimicry is largely based on the Lacanian vision, outlined by Jacques Lacan in his essay *The Line and Light* (1973), of mimicry as camouflage that results in colonial ambivalence, which in Bhabha's theory "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge". Kumar states, that Bhabha "is the foremost contemporary critic who has tried to unveil the contradictions inherent in colonial discourse in order to highlight the colonizer's ambivalence with respect to his attitude towards the colonized Other and vice versa" (2011, 119).

According to Gupta (2012, 1), mimicry is the result of "subordination of the eastern countries on the hands of the ruling classes". Postcolonial theory typically talks about the relationship between the East and the West when it deals with the dichotomy between "self" and "the Other", but these terms can be applied to other colonial contexts as well, such as that of Poland and Russia in the past. What makes the study of mimicry complex especially in

relation to Waclawiak's novel, though, is the fact Anya is a Polish-American who has already blended well into American society in her childhood, but nevertheless decides to pursue a Russian one through imitation. Thus, Gupta's (2012, 2) claim, that mimicry of the West is nowadays not only limited to European countries, but to the USA as well, is reversed in Waclawiak's novel. There, a Westerner, if Anya truly can be considered that, starts to look up to the East, and it is here where the history between the Polish and the Russians becomes relevant.

Put into the context of Waclawiak's novel, Anya's fascination with Russian culture and identity could be seen as a result of her being ashamed of her Polish-American identity, and her wish to gain a higher social status by impersonating a Russian in her neighborhood. The idea of high and low social status is repeatedly mentioned in the novel, and in many scenes of the novel Anya actually recalls experiencing embarrassment at being a Polish-American when spending time with the Russians, thus making the theory of colonial mimicry plausible in the novel. Another hypothesis is that her hybrid cultural identity might just appear too confusing or ambivalent to her, and that she wants to be part of a homogeneous cultural group that has its own established customs which seem exotic and interesting to her – exoticism is, after all, a large motivation for Anya's behaviour.

These hypotheses are supported by Bhabha's theory on mimicry. According to Bhabha:

colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power (1994, 122).

In Gupta's (2012, 5) words, mimicry "seems to be an opportunistic method of copying the person in power. This suppresses one's own cultural identity and leaves the person to an ambivalent and confused state". The colonized start to look at themselves as inferior human beings compared to the colonial masters, and therefore, as Gupta (2012, 5-6) claims, "it is not merely the imitation of the human behavior but the attitude and temperament come into play -- The native desires for something that he lacks and he keeps on learning the new strategies of imitation to achieve the desired goal". Bhabha also claims, that:

The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/ recognition of the colonial object (1994, 126).

According to Kumar (2011, 119), most postcolonial critics agree with this claim. Bhabha believes that mimicry is a sign of double articulation that is characterized by indeterminacy, and according to Kumar, "Bhabha justifies mimicry of the 'Other' because, for a colonial, 'Other' visualizes power" (Kumar 2011, 119). Gupta (2012, 6-7) also notes, that Bhabha believes that the process of imitation can never be complete, for "there are always cultural, historical, and racial differences which hinder one's complete transformation into something new". According to Gupta (2012, 7), "the obligation on part of the colonized to mirror back an image of the colonizer produces neither identity nor difference, only it is a sort of 'partial presence' in him, which is the basis of mimicry".

2.4 Los Angeles and Immigration

Los Angeles as an environment seems to play an important part in the novel. Anya has acquired herself an apartment in a mostly Russian neighborhood in Los Angeles, which results in her becoming fascinated by the Russians and their culture. In addition to this, Los

Angeles as a city appears to have a special meaning for not only Anya in her identity transformation process, but for immigrants in the United States in general as well. I will look at how exactly Los Angeles is depicted in Waclawiak's novel later in the analysis section, but for now it is important to look at Los Angeles from the perspective of immigration and urban space studies before its role in Waclawiak's novel can be analyzed.

According to Kathleen Conzen (1979, 603), "the immigrant neighborhood was for decades a distinctive element in the American urban landscape". Ethnicity was for many immigrants a fundamental choice upon their residential choice, and in Conzen's (1979, 604) words, "the processes of selection, invasion, and succession which thus structured the city into neighborhoods were regarded as intimately linked to immigrant assimilation". Los Angeles, together with New York, Chicago, and Houston, has a notably large immigrant population, as roughly one of every three of today's US immigrants live in these cities (Keogan 2010, 2). Of these four cities, New York has the largest amount of immigrants with close to 3 million foreign-born persons, but Los Angeles does not come far behind. The city area of Los Angeles hosts about 1.5 million foreign-born persons, whilst "Los Angeles County parallels New York City with close to 3½ million immigrants" (Keogan 2010, 2). Therefore, Keogan (2010, 2) notes, "it becomes clear that many of America's big cities are dominated by the immigrant familial experience". By the mid-1990s cities such as New York and Los Angeles had developed distinct cultural orientations toward their large foreign-born populations (Keogan 2010, 3). In his study *Immigrants and the Cultural Politics of Place: A Comparative Study of New York and Los Angeles* (2010), Keogan states:

The divergent symbolic contexts that have formed in the areas under study are the result of immigrant groups' struggles over material resources and cultural representation. Indicators of these symbolic contexts are the cultural representation of immigrants through time (e.g., history) and space (e.g., landscape). Moreover, I argue that local historical narratives and spatial symbols of immigration are more than mere indicators of cultural attitudes.

Rather, symbolic contexts significantly influence immigrant politics by providing cultural resources for the construction of collective identity (2010, 4).

In other words, he suggests that the urban environment and its symbolic contexts are linked with immigrants' identity and how others in the society view these immigrants. For example, Keogan (2010, 66) claims, that Los Angeles has long been seen as the city that has no past, but concentrates more on the future. It also has no significant landmarks of immigration, or a strong identification with its immigrant-ethnic origins, of which Mexicans, Chinese, and Japanese are the main immigrant-ethnic groups (Keogan 2010, 63). This would, therefore, have an impact on how immigrants living in the city perceive their immigrant identity. In Waclawiak's novel, for example, Anya notes how an immigrant neighborhood stays just that: "The yeast smell from the bakery overtakes everything and keeps it an immigrant neighborhood in Los Angeles" (2012, 8), which shows that an immigrant neighborhood is somehow less valued than another kind of neighborhood.

In the field of urban space studies, the notion of *space* means not only space that "is simply there", or simply the landscape of the place, but "a social entity with particular, localised meanings", which "prompts fresh consideration of the instrumentality of space as a register not only of built forms but also of embedded ideologies" (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000, 2). According to Wegner (2002, 183), "when reading any particular cultural phenomenon", it is necessary to take "into account its simultaneous embeddedness in a number of different 'nested' spatial contexts: body, home, community, city, region, nation, and globe". Space as a concept has been studied by theorists such as Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and literary theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Homi Bhabha (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000, 1). According to Balshaw and Kennedy:

space has become an increasingly irrepressible metaphor in contemporary cultural and critical theorising and a point of convergence for the work

emerging from the disciplinary meltdown of the humanities and, to a lesser extent, of the social sciences (2000, 1).

They continue, that an important result in urban space studies is, "that the city, as a universal object or category of analysis, has been demythologised and positioned as a site of spatial formations produced across diverse discursive regimes and everyday practices" (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000, 1).

Robert Tally (2013, 2) links these notions of urban space into the study of literature by claiming, that every person creates a mental map of the space that surrounds him in order to make sense of their place in the world, and that literature, as well, functions as a form of mapping by offering its readers descriptions of places, and situating them in an imaginary space by providing point of reference, by which "they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live". For immigrants, this orientation might prove difficult. According to Keogan (2010, 50), "cultural schema and narrative identity help influential members of civil society define who they are in relation to potential 'others'", and that "established narrative-identities provide cultural resources for boundary formation", which is "a crucial aspect of the politics of inclusion/exclusion". For immigrants, this can be problematic, for they "simultaneously inhabit the destination location, the home country *and* the migration pathway itself" and that "such fluidity creates problems in answering the question 'Where are you from?'" , which then raises questions about "national loyalties and domestic public policy" (Spencer et al., 2012, 438).

This relates to Tally's claim, that there is a connection between anxiety and a sense of place. According to Tally, the concept of "'transcendental homelessness' is a precursor to the notion of existential *angst* that would become powerful influence on literary and popular culture, especially in the post-Second World War period" (2013, 64). This angst, anxiety, dread, or anguish, is a key concept in existentialism, believed by Sartre to be derived from the

sense of freedom that a person must have in order "to create one's own meaningful existence, establishing a sense of place and purpose in the world" (Tally 2013, 64-65). In Tally's words: "In the anxiety that causes one to feel disoriented or lost, one has the freedom to project a kind of schematic representation of the world and one's place in it that becomes a way of making sense of things" (Tally 2013, 67). Tally continues:

by mapping, partly a metaphor for constellating the various forces that directly and indirectly affect human life, but here with a specifically spatial valence, it may be possible to overcome this anxious, transcendental homelessness. And if the human subjects does not exactly 'feel at home', then at least one can develop strategies for navigating these uncanny spaces of everyday life (2013, 66-67).

This kind of mapping, "used to aid in the navigation of social spaces", is similar to Fredric Jameson's concept of *cognitive mapping*, which is "conceived as a way to overcome the existential alienation of modern life", and can refer to an individual's attempt to "locate his or her position within a complex social organization or spatial milieu" (Tally 2013, 67-68). An example of this would be, in Tally's (2013,68) words, "a single person who is walking around in an unfamiliar city, attempting to gain a concrete sense of place in relation to various other places on a mental map". According to Tally, this example "reveals how cognitive mapping could be a crucial method by which to overcome the real anxiety of being lost, in the most urgent everyday sense as well as the more philosophical or existential sense" (2013, 68).

This is how Anya uses the city as tool in order to overcome the anxiety that her hybrid cultural identity has caused her, for she is clearly trying to understand the city and is learning how to navigate in this space in different ways, such as by impersonating the Russians. However, the fact that towards the end of the novel Anya starts seeing Los Angeles as an isolated place which tries to reject its people by its recurring natural disasters, suggest that she fails in this attempt, and her anxiety remains. In the following analysis chapter I intend to find out whether this hypothesis holds true.

3. Analysis of Karolina Waclawiak's *How to Get into the Twin Palms*

In the following subchapters I will first introduce the methods and material of my analysis, after which I will concentrate on analyzing Anya's immigrant identity, the themes of ethnic impersonation and mimicry, as well as the role of Los Angeles from the viewpoint of immigrant identity in the novel.

3.1 Methods and Material

The method of study will be qualitative research, in which I will analyse how the themes of ethnic impersonation, mimicry and hybrid cultural identity are present in Karolina Waclawiak's *How to Get into the Twin Palms*, and whether the findings from the novel support the different theories explored in the previous chapter. My hypothesis is that Anya is caught in the liminal stage between different identities, and that this together with the effects that the surrounding space has on a person, might cause her to engage in acts of ethnic impersonation and mimicry. In my analysis I intend to show which parts of the novel support this hypothesis, and have decided to divide the analysis into three different subchapters that deal with Anya's immigrant identity, ethnic impersonation and mimicry in the novel, and Anya's relationship with Los Angeles.

How to Get into the Twin Palms, published in 2012, is the debut novel of the Polish-American author Karolina Waclawiak. In an interview conducted by the *New York Times* in July 30, 2012, Waclawiak stated, that:

I do share her questions about culture and identity. I was born in Lodz, Poland, and came to America when I was 2 years old. I don't remember our journey at all, but it's had a large impact on me. Like Anya, I did go to a summer camp for refugee children in Texas when I was young, and it was largely split between Eastern European and Asian refugees. Many had only been in the country for a few years but I had been in America nearly my entire life, so it was a strange experience (Williams, July 30, 2012).

She also mentions, that there actually was a night club called the Twin Palms in Los Angeles, and that "It was a mysterious place that would suddenly perk up with Russians in fancy attire after looking largely vacant. I wanted to know what was going on inside but didn't have the privilege of access" (Williams, July 30, 2012). In relation to the emphasis on Los Angeles as a setting in the novel, Waclawiak states, that "I started reading John Fante religiously in my early 20s, and was so taken by the specificity of Los Angeles in his books that I knew I had to develop a strong sense of place in my own writing" (Williams, July 30, 2012).

The novel is written in first person and is narrated by the 25-year-old Polish-American protagonist who calls herself Anya, but is actually named Zosia. However, because she is mostly referred to in the novel as Anya, I have chosen to call the protagonist by her chosen name in my thesis. The chapters are, for the most part, rather short, and the timeline of the novel switches from the present to the past continuously: the narration is occasionally interrupted by flashbacks to Anya's past in Poland, and there is an emphasis on her personal experiences as an immigrant living in the United States. Anya's present life seems to be filled with idleness and even loneliness, which, no doubt, appear to be the major reasons why she turns her attention to the Russians in her neighborhood in the first place, and why she can be claimed to be suffering from identity diffusion. After being laid off of her job and deciding to take the unemployment period as a chance for a holiday, all she seems to be doing is wandering around the city, although she does run a bingo once a week for the elderly at the Catholic Holy Virgin church. Her only recurring contacts with other human beings during this time appear to be Mary, who is an elderly widowed woman from the bingo, her Russian neighbors, her Russian lover Lev, and her mother, who calls her occasionally.

After observing the Russians going to the Twin Palms opposite her home for a while, she sets the goal of appearing as a Russian in order to gain entrance to the club. With this in

mind, she approaches Lev, a Russian man who frequents the club, thinking that besides him she will gain access to the club more easily. With passing in mind, she starts calling herself Anya in order to sound more Russian, dyes her hair similar to the Russians', and dresses more like a Russian. In the end, she does gain access to the club, but is greeted hostilely by Lev's wife and her Russians friends, and leaves disappointed from the club. After that, she abandons the idea of passing, wanders around the city, which is ravaged by forest fires, and sets fire to Mary's house in an apparent goal to set Mary free from her past, after which she ends up leaving Los Angeles altogether.

The novel holds all the themes defined by Pourjafari and Vahidpour (2014, 686-689) to be essential to immigrant fiction: hybridity, ambivalence and adjustment, and abandonment and return. Firstly, Anya appears to have a hybrid cultural identity. She struggles with the ambivalence caused by her bicultural background, and tries to adjust to this by trying to accommodate to first American, then Polish, and later Russian culture. What Anya seems to be lacking, is the ability to truly engage in the hybridity of two cultures. Instead, she tries to abandon her hybrid cultural identity and its ambivalence by impersonating a Russian.

3.2 Anya's Immigrant Identity

The novel begins with a short paragraph where Anya wonders about and explains her decision to pass as a Russian:

It was a strange choice to decide to pass as a Russian. But it was a question of proximity and level of allure. Russians were everywhere in Los Angeles, especially in my neighborhood, and held a certain sense of mystery. I had long attempted to inhabit my Polish skin and was happy to finally crawl out of it. I would never tell my mother. She only thought of them as crooks and beneath us. They felt the same about us, we were beneath them. It had always been a question of who was under whom (2012, 5).

This paragraph is extremely revealing of Anya's thoughts about herself, her Polish-American

cultural identity, and her attitude towards the Russians. It also reveals the ongoing power struggle in the relationship between the Polish and the Russians, which is coloured by feelings of inferiority and superiority on both parts. This power struggle relates to Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry, which I will concentrate on in more detail in the following subchapter. However, what can be concluded from the first chapter of the novel in terms of Anya's cultural identity, is that she has mixed feelings towards her heritage, and unlike her mother, she looks up to the Russians. From very early on in the novel, it also becomes clear that Anya is not sure how to define her own cultural identity, which confirms the idea that her hybrid cultural identity and its ambivalence is causing her identity diffusion.

In the first chapters of the novel Anya reveals that she was born in Poland to Polish parents, and moved to the United States as a child:

What I am is always the first question. Since the camps. Since always. One camp was in Austria when I was really small, after we left our village and before my father began to fear everything. While we waited for a country to take us, Reagan became our hero. While he worked hard to stamp out Communism, he let us sneak in on a Pan Am flight (2012, 20).

The second camp in the United States was meant to be a place where immigrant children "could learn to be American" (20, 2012). This is in accordance with Conzen and Gerben's (1992) claim, that "the dominant interpretation both in American historiography and nationalist ideology had been one of rapid and easy assimilation". According to Matthew A. Jendian (2008, 73), "language, literature/popular media, food, and religion" are important components of cultural assimilation, and these were also the things taught to Anya in the camps. According to Anya, in Texas they "took classes like arts and crafts and classes about appropriate assimilation and learned about MTV. American pop culture. I already knew about it. I danced hungry like the wolf" (20, 2012), and that in the camp they were also told to act "accent-less, unlike our parents", for "we still had a chance in this country, we could still

pass" (22, 2012). However, this assimilation did not bring her a straightforward cultural identity, and in the camp in Texas she also recalls feeling like an outsider, a feeling which appears to have stayed with her in her adulthood: "I wasn't off the boat anymore, like these people. The second wave of immigrants from Poland, Russia, Laos, Cambodia. We couldn't speak to one another. They were too fresh" (21, 2012).

Another idea that has stayed with her from the camps is the idea of appropriate behaviour. At the beginning of the novel Anya states that her next door Polish neighbor does not know how to behave appropriately like an American:

Her single son climbs into her groundlevel balcony every day, pulls open the sliding glass door and goes inside. A few minutes later he comes back out of the front door with a small bag of garbage and brings it to the dumpster. Every day.

Why not use the front door each time? It was some kind of strange ritual I did not understand. I never considered scaling my balcony to press through my sliding glass. We were supposed to be cultured here and not do those kind of things in this country. Or call attention to ourselves. I wasn't sure why he didn't know we used the front door, always. (2012, 14).

On a later chapter, Anya also proclaims how she understands the "importance of looking good at work", and then proceeds to tell how her mother's employer once scolded her mother for not wearing a bra or stockings: "She would come home and peel the stockings off her sweaty legs. She would tell me they said she looked too foreign, indecent. In America you couldn't show skin" (37, 2012). These kind of deviations from the norms seem to annoy Anya immensely, which is odd considering that when she starts to impersonate a Russian, she behaves exactly in the opposite way. For example, when she walks past Russian men in the streets, she intentionally tries to draw their attention to her, and once even whistles to a man who passes her apartment (2012, 6). In her attempt to mimic the Russians, she also colors her hair a striking dark, "moody" colour (15, 2012), and starts wearing clothes that draw attention to her. This appears to be the opposite of the belief that one should not try to call attention to

themselves in the United States, a rule strongly respected by Anya before. So why does Anya suddenly break the rules of assimilation she so strongly seemed to adhere to?

The change in her behaviour is especially confusing since especially in her childhood, it was the American culture that she was drawn to. Anya proclaims, that she "never wanted to be a good Polish girl" (2012, 20), and that she disliked parts of Polish culture, such as the food: "We ate galaretki at our house. Things little girls did not like" (2012, 21). Instead, she liked the bread, butter and sugar sandwiches that her neighbor made to her regularly, coated with the exotic margarine that was not to be found on the refrigerator on her parents' house, and which Anya kept a secret from her mother (2012, 21). According to Anya, the neighbor who fed her these sandwiches felt bad for her family because of their "threadbare clothing, church donated in black bags, broken arm dolls" (20, 2012).

Religion is also another problematic aspect of Polish culture for Anya, even though she is interested and fascinated by it, which becomes clear in a scene where she recalls noticing the differences between the churches in Poland and America: "In this church in Poland there were no lottery tickets stuck around the altar. Just the food and the Black Madonna staring down cut on her face, holding her son" (2012, 115), and stating that she liked to hear the Polish words spoken in the Polish church "and not add in my English version. I liked to stumble along in Polish" (2012, 132). This shows that Anya does at least like to try the role of a Polish person, but a phone call with her mother reveals that it is not a role she finds herself comfortable in. When her mother asks her if Anya went to the church, she falls silent, and thinks about "telling her about the Holy Virgin, converting bingo nights into 3-hour church service, me on the pulpit, calling numbers, helping the wounded widows of the Holy Virgin forget about their deceased husbands", by which she most likely refers to Mary, the lonely widower from the bingo who she occasionally chats with (2012, 128). With

no reply to her mother's question, her mother asks her "What kind of woman do you hope to be if you don't go to church?", and continues her criticism by saying: "Church. One hour each Sunday is not a lot to ask, Zosia. And yet you can't even do that" (2012, 128). Her mother proceeds to tell her that Anya can never be happy if she doesn't go to church, and despite her thinking that "I liked listening to what she had to say about the happiness-is-religion equation. It was always ridiculous to me, but she believed it wholeheartedly" (2012, 128), it becomes clear that her mother's opinions actually do add to her identity confusion, and make her disappointed in not being able to fulfill her mother's wishes. It also reveals the motivation behind Anya's decision later in the novel to burn down Mary's house – this way Anya can attempt to save Mary from being stuck in the past, and she can finally be the good Polish catholic woman who can help "the wounded widows of the Holy Virgin forget about their deceased husbands" (2012, 128).

Another important aspect of the immigrant experience which comes up in Anya's phone call with her mother, is the idea of immigrant guilt. When her mother asks her about how she is doing, she lies to her about "living the American dream" and enjoying her job in a recruitment center, even though she has just been made redundant herself, and lives on welfare at the moment. Her mother, not knowing the truth and being proud of her job, says: "You are getting people off welfare. That's the worst you can be in this country", and continues by proclaiming, that "We only took handouts once. And not money. Just clothes. Nothing else" (2012, 128). To this, Anya thinks to herself: "I didn't want to tell her that I had been taking handouts for months. It would only depress her. Her immigrant guilt was too much for me" (2012, 128).

Anya also notes, that her mother "tried to hide her accent or maybe I was used to it and couldn't hear it anymore" (2012, 127). This would speak for her parents also wanting to

shed their Polish roots, even though they also want to hold on to certain Polish traditions. According to Anya in her discussion with Lev later in the novel, her parents do not mix with the Polish in the United States (2012, 96). But they do keep in touch with their relatives in Poland. Occasionally either Anya's Polish grandparents visit them in America, or Anya's family goes to Poland to visit their grandparents, who took over their apartment in Poland and gave up their own village home "because the Communists would only allow one dwelling per husband and wife" (2012, 35). In Anya's words, "They took over our apartment in case we ever wanted to come back, in case America did not work out" (2012, 35).

But as it turns out, Anya's parents never moved back, and resorted to only visiting Poland. In one chapter of the novel, Anya reminisces of her experiences in Poland in one of these visits. She describes the neighborhood as being a big gray *bloki*, the wallpaper in their old apartment having yellowed, and the plastic floral tablecloth faded - "Strictly Eastern Bloc fare" (2012, 73-74). Everything seems foreign compared to America, of which the relatives are eager to hear stories about. In addition to being interested in the American way of living, Anya's relatives "would send letters begging for blue jeans and my mother put together boxes for them. Everything American. Even things we didn't have" (2012, 75), which could be a possible source of resentment for her. Anya also describes how she had been unaware of certain Polish habits, such as the three kisses done on greetings, and having difficulty in understanding the Polish language: "They spoke so fast and I tried to understand between the giggles" (2012, 74). Her mother, as well, seems to have forgotten some of the Polish habits: she "had stopped making pickle soup long ago and she did not know how to make *sharlotka*", unlike her aunt, who prepared them a full dinner of traditional Polish meals all from scratch (2012, 74). This also shows, that Anya's parents have wanted to at least partially adapt to the American society, and forget some of their Polish traditions.

What becomes apparent from these memories, is that Anya feels like an outsider in Poland, for Polish culture seems foreign for her and at times even a source of embarrassment. Based on the different theories on hybridity and cultural identity, one could draw the conclusion that these kinds of feelings could result in feelings of rootlessness, and therefore identity diffusion. And indeed, this is exactly how Anya appears to feel: she states that "I was from nowhere" (2012, 11), and remarks with what appears to be a somewhat sarcastic tone, that she is still learning both Polish and English (2012, 23). She also says:

I watch these old women in my neighborhood make this walk and I know that I never will, this old woman babushka walk. I will never wear a chustka on my head or put my swollen feet into perforated Eastern Bloc shoes with their American brand names. I will not crawl down the street, hunchbacked and slow. These are remnants of old country and I'm not that anymore. Or I never was (35, 2012).

This kind of rejection of one's cultural identity relates to Bukowczyk's questions of who can become a "Pole" or "Polish American", who can never be a "true Pole", and "How can one shed the identity and leave the group? (2011, 189). A possible answer to the latter question could be ethnic impersonation and mimicry, which Anya actually knows that she is good at: "I had been in America longer than the rest of these children. Mimicry is what I was good at. I observed and made practiced movements, keeping quiet so that I could listen. It pleased me to know I *could* do these things" (22, 2012).

3.3 Ethnic Impersonation and Mimicry in the Novel

As pointed out in the previous subchapter, Anya enjoys the idea of being in disguise, mimicking others, and letting other people guess her ethnicity. In her words: "I know what they want to ask. *Polska? Ruska? Svedka?* Or maybe just *Amerykanska*. They can't tell with me" (2012, 8). Like Anya's cultural identity, the concept of ethnicity itself can be ambiguous. According to Jendian, "In social research, the concepts of ethnicity, ethnic group, and ethnic

identity are often ambiguous. Ethnicity has been used to refer to characteristics of both an ethnic group as a whole (Glazer and Moynihan 1975) and individual members of an ethnic group" (2008, 11). In this case, a Polish-American person starts to impersonate a Russian by mimicking the characteristics of a Russian culture present in the immigrant neighborhoods of Los Angeles. In order to do that, Anya observes the Russians she sees in her neighborhood, and is even voyeuristic in her behaviour. She lives opposite the Twin Palms, and hides behind her ficus on her balcony in order to watch the Russians who enter the club. Anya also describes walking too close to the Russian women who enter the Twin Palms. These Russian women wear expensive furs, which according to Anya, are familiar to her from her childhood in Poland: "A sign of a good husband in Poland is one who puts you in a silver fox, short or long" (2012, 8). When Anya gets so close to the women that her "face touches the scruff of their arm. The mink of their sleeve", the women curse her in Russian, calling her a *suka*, a bitch (2012, 8). Later in the novel, someone actually steals her ficus, which could mean that someone has noticed her behaviour and wishes her to stop it, but she finds other ways of observing the people, such as driving around Los Angeles, and shopping in the ethnic shops around the city.

Anya is very aware of the apparent social status of the Russians she sees, a behaviour akin to the process of cognitive mapping. She claims to know who is a *suka*, and who is someone's wife (2012, 6). She also observes how some of the Russians are "better" than others. For example, Anya observes that the Russians and Ukrainians on her street are "not like the Russians in the Twin Palms" (2012, 7). In Anya's words:

They wear plastic shoes and stand with their socks pulled up. The men wear shorts and their bellies hang down and out of their yellowing undershirts. The women weep. The men yell. I see them watching me through their crocheted curtains, waiting to see who comes in and who comes out of my apartment. Picking the ones I should be ashamed of (2012, 7).

These Russians, most of whom are cab drivers, are also rather ruthlessly described by Anya as having "Eastern Bloc homemade haircuts – a custom they never gave up in America" (2012, 8), whereas the "better" Russians are "well fed and wear their shirts unbuttoned two buttons to show their chest hair, their lion's mane" (2012, 13). The Russians who frequent the Twin Palms also "do not wear shorts. They wear slacks and silk shirts unbuttoned and leather jackets even if the Santa Ana winds are roaring" (2012, 14). When Anya tries to get their attention by whistling them from her balcony, the men just keep walking, which makes Anya think she is not their type (2012, 13), something which surely motivates her to soon colour her hair darker and change her appearance drastically.

It is these "better" Russians who Anya wishes to impersonate, and in order to prove that she could pass as one, she sets gaining access to the Twin Palms as her main goal: "I want to get inside the Twin Palms. I want them to ask me what I am" (2012, 7). In addition to changing her appearance, she also wonders whether becoming one of the Russians' girlfriend would get her into the club. She is extremely calculating in her attempts to pass, and wonders whether she should "wait for better Russians to come or should I try my luck with these" (2012, 9). Her subsequent relationship with a Russian man called Lev is the result of these calculations – he is just a tool for her by which she can enter the Twin Palms, a club that she fantasizes of:

I would go into the Twin Palms and be on his arm. I would do that willingly. I tried to visualize the Twin Palms while I lay there. What was inside. If the waiters wore tuxedos. How big it was. If it had secret entrances. If it spilled into the other buildings. Where you stood and where you sat. What you ate. I tried but I couldn't even imagine it (2012, 50).

The first move, however, that Anya does in regards to her passing is changing her name from the Polish Zosia to Anya. Anya reasons, that "If I am going to spend my time at the Twin Palms I want it to be frequent. I want them to know me. I want to pass fully. What

will my name be? I will have to change the *I* to *Y*. I will have to get my story straight" (2012, 9). In regards to her name choice, she says "it could pass for Polish or Russian. I could move easily with it. Fluidly" (2012, 10). The idea of not having a fixed identity and being able to move between different identities is important to her, and confirms that Anya is in fact impersonating, or passing, instead of performing a seamless imposture. Also, the fact that Anya feels rootless becomes apparent again when she tries out a Russian accent, but fails with it and switches back to her flat American accent, thinking that "I was from nowhere and I had lived in too many places to hold on to anything permanent in my voice" (2012, 11).

The next change that Anya makes in regards to her transformation from a Polish-American to a Russian is to colour her hair darker so that she matches a fantasy that she has of herself as a Russian woman. Anya goes to a neighborhood salon to colour her hair darker, and she brings with her a picture taken from *Burda*, "the only magazine I know of that is both for Polish and Russian women" (2012, 15). Anya cannot read the Cyrillic letters, but says she is "transfixed" by them (2012, 15). Later, when she colours her hair again to touch up the roots, she chooses a raven-shaded darker colour in order to "add to my mystery" (2012, 101).

In her words:

I wanted my eyes to glow and my skin to look luminescent. Like in the cover girl magazines I was seeing. The new thing was Vamp. I think Lev would like it. It would look Russian, maybe Siberian, and it would look good against fur. I had a vision of myself and I liked it (2012, 101).

However, the fact that she brings a magazine meant for Polish women as well speaks for her wanting to keep her options open in regards to her identity – her transformation to a Russian is, again, proved not be a complete one. Instead, Anya appears to enjoy people guessing her identity, but at the same time, she wishes to look more Russian to the Russians, and more Polish to the Polish. For example, she visits a Polish store, in which she feels that she is "a strange in between" for the Polish people in the store (2012, 24). She also buys sauerkraut

from the Polish store which she will "never eat, and chocolates filled with plums that will get pushed to the back of the cupboard" (2012, 24). For Anya, these foods are "reminders of who I am, but who I am not quite" (2012, 24). This shows, that Anya is in fact caught in the liminal stage between identities, which according to Bhabha, "opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (1994, 5). Therefore, it can be argued that despite having a hybrid cultural identity, Anya has not yet truly accepted it. She is a mixture of two cultures, but tries to be something else completely.

When she wants to appear Russian, she changes into different clothes and walks back and forth the Twin Palms trying to attract the Russian men hanging outside the club. She notes, that the Russian men start to like her more now that she looks more Eastern European and less American with her changed appearance. Anya believes, that she is finally "starting to make sense to them", and that she has killed her ability to pass for Middle American. Instead, she claims to feel like she is from the *bloki* again (2012, 16). Another important part of Anya's impersonation process is to take on smoking just to appear like the Russian women she has seen: "I was going to be a casual smoker, I decided. I hadn't seen the women in front of the Twin Palms repeatedly snuffing out cigarettes like the men. They smoked slim cigarettes, like small straws. Virginia Slims. A few puffs finished them off" (2012, 38). She spends a vast amount of her unemployment check to try out different brands of ultra slim cigarettes, but in her words: "It wasn't working. My fingers weren't thin enough. The elongated straws made my fingers look like sausages. Overplump sausages. I didn't look sexy at all. I would have to take them home and practice" (2012, 39). Anya also wants to buy a new bra to appear more sexy, but does not have the money to buy the brand she wants. Instead, she buys the next best thing, and manages to attract the attention of a Ukrainian man on the street, a proof that she craves men's attention (2012, 49).

Anya's transformation stays rather on the surface level also when she tries learning the Russian language, but gives up after having learned a few words. When Anya first approaches Lev, she panics and speaks English to him, revealing to him instantly that she is not Russian. She wonders: "Should I yell to him in words I have just learned or speak to him in English? I panic and speak English" (2012, 17). But obviously, that is the only choice she could make, for not having properly learned the language, she could never fully pass as a Russian. This is another proof that Anya had never even intended to fully turn into a Russian. She only wants to have the Russian men guessing her identity and looking for "signs of who I am and where I am from", or whether she is "just another American" (2012, 18). And when Lev sees the Polish food that Anya has bought and remarks that Anya is now "a good Polish girl", she enjoys this: "I like that I have some pull with him. That I am not just American. That I am closer to him. That is my trick" (2012, 24). Her behaviour is not, therefore, an act of seamless imposture, where the audience and even the person him or herself is convinced about the performance (Chen 2005, 7). Instead, Anya engages in a process of impersonation, which According to Chen (2005, 8-9), is "not equivalent to deception and fraudulence", nor "about performing someone's else's identity", but instead, "about performing into being a sense of one's own personhood" (Chen 2005, 9).

What is fascinating is that in her adulthood, Anya wants to identify as a Russian the most, and as an American the least. As a Westernized Polish person, the Russian traditions fascinate her, and she seems to want the acceptance of the people living in her neighborhood, who try to guess her nationality and are disappointed if they find out she is "just an American" (2012, 8). Anya also can't tell her mother how much she admires the Russians, for her mother "only thought of them as crooks and beneath us", and that the Russians "felt the same way about us, we were beneath them" (2012, 5). These attitudes and expectations reveal

a complex struggle for power, which can be traced back to the colonial history between Poland and Russia, and Bhabha's theory in colonial mimicry can help explain this behaviour.

As Bhabha (1994, 122) suggests in his theory on mimicry, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite". According to Bhabha,

conflictual economy of colonial discourse which Edward Said describes as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination – the demand for identity, stasism and the counter-pressure of the diachrony of history, change, difference – mimicry represents an *ironic* compromise (1994, 122).

Therefore, Bhabha (1994, 122) continues, mimicry is the "sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualized power". He also notes, that mimicry is a sign of the inappropriate, a difference which "coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha 1994, 123). It is this notion of a normalized knowledge of disciplinary powers that Anya threatens with her mimicry of the Russians as a Polish-American person.

In Gupta's (2012, 5) words, Bhabha believes that mimicry "is one of the most effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge", for the "feeling of superiority of the colonial masters over the natives leads the members of the colonized nation to look at themselves as the inferior human beings", and thus they start "imitating the behaviours, attitudes, language and culture of the colonizers". This behaviour, Gupta (2012, 5) concludes, "automatically establishes the belief that the West is always 'educated', 'civilized', 'reformed', 'disciplined', and 'knowledgeable', while the east is illiterate, barbaric, primitive and ignorant.". In Waclawiak's novel, the roles between the East and the West are reversed, but what remains the same is the desire to imitate the colonial masters, who in Anya's case are the Russians who have had power over the Polish in the past. It is also important to note, that

before imitating the Russians, Anya had been firmly acquiring the American identity, again proving that the Polish cultural identity was looked down by her, and that both Anya and her parents have had the desire to integrate into the Western society, therefore affirming the Bhabha's notion that the West is generally seen as more desirable than the East. Also, the fact that Anya seems confused about her identity, especially when it is revealed that Lev can see through her imitation, is in accordance with Bhabha's notion that mimicry seems to be an "opportunistic method of copying the person in power", which "suppresses one's own cultural identity and leaves the person to an ambivalent and confused state" (Gupta 2012, 5). Therefore, using mimicry as a way to escape the ambivalence of her bicultural identity is in fact just making her more confused, and soon Anya appears to notice it herself as well.

This becomes clear in the scene where Lev takes Anya to a Polish restaurant in an apparent attempt to get her closer to her roots and cherish her Polish heritage. Despite initially using her Polishness to attract Lev, it has become a source of embarrassment to her, most likely because she is in fact a Polish-American and does not know the Polish customs thoroughly. In this scene Lev wakes Anya up and surprises her by driving them to Fairfax, "away from the Twin Palms" and towards Little Armenia in Los Angeles, not revealing her at first where they are going (2012, 96). During the drive Lev asks Anya about her past and her family. When Anya reveals that her parents live in Texas, Lev wonders whether there are any Polish people living there, to which Anya answers that her parents "want to be American so they only mix with Americans". To this Lev jokingly says: "I wouldn't mix with Polish either" (2012, 96), which reveals the Russians' condescending attitudes towards the Polish, and makes Anya annoyed at him.

Therefore, it seems surprising that Lev even attempts to get Anya to feel more connected with her culture. Apparently, it seems important to him that one should always be

proud of their own cultural heritage, just as he is proud of his Russian roots. However, Lev fails in the attempt to make Anya feel proud of being Polish, not only because he continues to make demeaning jokes about the Polish, but also because during the drive he reveals that he can see through her impersonation. After their discussion about Anya's parents and the Polish community of Texas, Lev says: "And you want to be something else entirely", to which Anya claims she does not "want to be anything at all", not actually believing this statement herself (2012, 94). In Anya's words: "I said it but I didn't mean it. My passing wasn't working and everything was jumbled in my head" (2012, 95), showing that Anya has noticed that mimicry is just making her more confused.

In the restaurant Anya feels even more at unease because of Lev's comments. Lev tells Anya that her Polish has an American accent, and that it is "rudimentary" and resembles "a young child's Polish" (2012, 96). While they eat a bowl of borscht, Lev also asks whether her parents mind that she lives so far away from them now, and proceeds to say that her parents just "stay in their Polish Ghetto in Texas", which offends Anya (2012, 97). This shows that Anya does care about her Polish roots, but is embarrassed of the hybridity of her identity. After the comment Anya wants to leave the restaurant, and thinks to herself: "This wasn't where I wanted to be. This wasn't the Twin Palms. I didn't care about passing anymore" (2012, 98).

As stated before, Bhabha believes that the process of imitation in mimicry is never completed, for the "native desires for something that he lacks and he keeps on learning the new strategies of imitation to achieve the desired goal", and cultural, historical, and racial differences hinder one's complete transformation (Gupta 2012, 6). Instead, the "desire of the colonized for the total metamorphosis and have the power of the imperial master is never fulfilled" (Gupta 2012, 6). In Anya's case, this appears to be true. Anya feels discouraged

from continuing her transformation after Lev's comments, and she finds that she cannot escape her Polish-American identity through ethnic impersonation.

But even after this, she still wishes to visit the Twin Palms, perhaps out of curiosity, or perhaps because she has come this far already, and with Lev she can actually achieve her goal of entering the club. Therefore, Anya allows Lev to stay at her place for a while, but grows tired of him soon. Their relationship seems to reflect the colonial power struggle in many ways: Lev has power over her, for he disappears frequently and asks her to "Just stay here and wait for me", to which Anya thinks "And now I would be the one waiting for him, wondering where he was" (2012, 150), also knowing that he has a wife somewhere. But Anya is equally taking advantage of Lev – with him she can enter the club, and try all the different roles that do not come naturally to her. For example, she attempts to make *zurek*, a traditional eastern European dish for Lev, but fails to make it well. This is also what happened to her when as a child her mother tried to teach her sewing, which she "would never learn, and could never do, not even now" (2012, 159). This shows that despite her claim that she does not want to pass anymore, in reality she actually still wants to pass, if not as Russian, then at least as a good wife figure, or as a good Polish woman.

The moment when Anya finally enters the Twin Palms occurs after preparing the *zurek*:

I think I made it too sour. I let the bread and rye ferment too long. He spit it back up and that was it. That was when he asked to take me somewhere. I knew I could ask for the Twin Palms now, and he couldn't say no. "I only want to go to one place", I said, getting bold now. I had nothing to lose – he had lost his luster to me (2012, 163).

Anya puts on a dress, curls her hair, puts on make up and a pair of high heeled shoes, and they walk to the club hand in hand, Anya thinking that she is "finally allowed in" (2012, 164).

When they enter the club, Anya observes the people around her, much like they do her:

"What I wouldn't do for one of those long, slim cigarettes in the hands of the women standing there, looking me up and down, checking to see if my teeth were real, if my roots were pronounced, how I walked, if I was pigeon-toed. Why I was with Lev" (2012, 164). After they stop looking, Anya admits she "hoped for a longer look, a longer glare, more curiosity", and feels soon that "I had made a mistake to come here" (2012, 164). This is apparently what Lev thinks as well, for a while later he says: "Anka, you should go" (2012, 164). However, Anya ignores him, to which Lev says: "Anka, you don't understand. It's not right for you to be here" (2012, 164), and "I'm going to take you home" (2012, 165). This suggests, that something has convinced Lev that Anya cannot be part of the community, and that her being there could cause problems either for him or for her. And as it turns out, Anya's visit to the Twin Palms will cause problems.

For a while Anya wanders around the club, having left Lev on his own, and again she seems to be excited to be finally able to see what the Twin Palms looks like inside. However, what she sees makes her disappointed. The walls have a poorly painted picture of New York skyline in them, which prompts Anya to wonder what it has to do with the rest of the décor, "but I knew it seemed glamorous to them" (2012, 195). This statement makes it clear that Anya does not feel like the Russians in the club, but an outsider. She also notes seeing food, familiar to her from her childhood, being served on the tables, and a green carpet which reminds her of a casino. The experience of finally being in the Twin Palms and seeing it all in the flesh is stressful to her: "It was causing me anxiety, the Russian, the people, the smell of everyone mixed with the food. It looked aged, stuck in time, but I knew it was fresh and made especially for them" (2012, 165). Thus, it becomes obvious that Anya is let down – this is not the Twin Palms of her dreams, and she is clearly not one of the Russians. All her efforts at passing have ended to this, and her fantasy has been broken.

Things take a turn for the worse when Anya enters the bathroom of the club. She hears women talking over the stalls in Russian, and wants to leave before they get out. But she does not make it in time, and a woman "with heaving breasts, loose-fitting leopard gauzy fabric over them" comes over to her and starts talking in Russian:

for a moment I froze, thinking I had made it. I had passed. The other two women came out of the stall and stared at me too. One had lipstick on thick, carrot-colored that she went to reapply. The other looked at me carefully. Again, the barrel-breasted woman spoke to me and all I could say was, '*Nie rozumiem*!'. 'What you say?' she asked me. She slurred it really. I could smell booze on her breath and I knew. She said something in Russian to the other women, the women from the stall, and the woman with Sucrets and Tic Tacs, and I still couldn't understand. All I heard was the word Lev (2012, 166).

The women block the door of the bathroom and question her about Lev, after which they reveal that one of the women is Lev's wife, and that Lev has "three kids at home. One baby", "And two in Moscow". Anya is not surprised, and Lev's wife says "What you think, you his first *shluha*?" (2012, 168). The women start spitting on her, and Anya fights them back, causing one of them to drop their dentures on the floor and breaking them. The final ending point for Anya's desires to pass as a Russian comes when: "Lev's wife looked at me; she had hung back, kept her petal-pink suit tidy and away from my flailing hands. We looked at each other then and I knew I had no right to attack her. She was everything I now realized I never wanted to become". And as Anya leaves the bathroom, she finds Lev standing outside the door looking "scared for the first time" - "He was saying things like, *Devochka, are you okay*, things like that. He tried to pull me away from the door, with him, but I just pushed past him. Out of the Twin Palms." (2012, 169).

In the final scenes of the novel, the city and the urban experience of Los Angeles are tied together with Anya's decision to finally fully abandon her attempts to impersonate a Russian, for she ends up leaving Los Angeles altogether after burning Lev's clothes and Mary's house in a ritualistic way. In the next subchapter, I will be concentrating on the role of

Los Angeles in these events, and in the novel in general.

3.4 Anya and Los Angeles

Los Angeles appears to have an important role in *How to Get into the Twin Palms* in many ways. First of all, it is the setting for Anya's search for an identity, and is ever present in the novel as a background to the events - the forest fires, the ash falling from the sky, and the heat are all mentioned continuously throughout the novel. In addition to this, the city appears to have an important role for Anya as well, for she consciously wants to understand the city: "Here it was. Los Angeles. – This city was cut up into neat squares. Avenue's were dissected by boulevards which were dissected by streets and I wanted it all to mean something to me. I wanted to understand" (2012, 171). Anya also strolls and drives around the city observing her surroundings like a flâneur, mapping the space around her. According to Anya:

I liked driving down Hollywood. On the east edge, near the border of Little Armenia and next to the old apartments. Some had spires. There were castles on Hayworth too, where I lived, but these were bigger, more foreboding. They weren't like the two-story stuccos built in the '70s with the tropically deceptive names (2012, 77).

Her own neighborhood she describes as being ethnic, and different from the other neighborhoods:

Our buildings are all squat, two-storied, with balconies. All somewhat the same, tan stucco or white stucco or beige, fading into another. Nondescript and unobtrusive, always striving to be mildly pleasant and to blend into the California landscape. But our block was different, house plants sitting outside, brightly beaded curtains haphazardly attached to the railing with butcher twine, and faded lace curtains in the windows. We were still ethnic here. When people walked by, they would point at the windows and say things like, 'Why are they drying their clothes outside? Aren't they afraid they'll get stolen?' No one's ever did. Not with Boris hanging out his window everyday, watching everyone go by (2012, 25-26).

After this, she starts thinking about how she can never be a good girl, a more permissive woman than the women in her street (2012, 26). This is directly linked with Tally's notions on

how individuals try to cope with their anxiety through cognitive mapping in order to make sense of the space that surrounds them. Therefore, the effect that the urban space of Los Angeles has on Anya's immigrant experience cannot be ignored.

According to Balshaw and Kennedy (2000, 6), the notion of place can evoke questions of subjectivity and urban space, for places carry affective connotations, which are "charged with emotional and mythical meanings; the localised stories, images and memories associated with place provide meaningful cultural and historical bearings for urban individuals and communities". This certainly seems to be the case in *How to Get into the Twin Palms*, where Anya appears to be aware of the stories and cultural bearings of the city and its people. For example, Anya describes Fairfax: "More people seemed to walk on Fairfax than anywhere else, visiting the *apteka*, purchasing orthopedic shoes in discreet black bags, stopping in the grocery and buying cans of food labeled in different languages" (2012, 100), and: "As I walk down the street the smell overwhelms me. The smell of rye bread and *ponchki* filled with prune jam. The yeast smell from the bakery overtakes everything and keeps it an immigrant neighborhood in Los Angeles" (2012, 8). The latter statement seems to suggest, that an immigrant neighborhood is *just* an immigrant neighborhood, somehow less than other neighborhoods of the city. This would comply with Keogan's (2010, 109) statement, that "Los Angeles is void of positive symbolism in relation to its immigrant history", although different ethnicities certainly are present in Los Angeles in the form of immigrant neighborhoods, ethnic stores, and churches, such as the Polish Catholic church of Los Angeles.

According to Balshaw and Kennedy, "Some theorists argue that place is being erased by the spatial experiences of late capitalism – the simulacral, the hyperreal, the depthless – and by the global 'flows' of information and images", but they also note, that "the idea of

place should not be hastily theorised away, for it reminds us that space is not only metaphoric but also metonymic in its productions" (2000, 109). By this they mean, that places "are sites of spatial contiguity, of interdependence and entailment, which take on contours of identity and location through representation" (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000, 109). This would seem true in the light of Waclawiak's novel, where place appears to affect and act as a stage where identity is developed and represented. Balshaw and Kennedy continue on the relationship between identity and urban space by stating, that:

questions of (il)legibility and (in)visibility are implicated in representation as struggles for power and identity. This is perhaps most obviously marked in the categories of spatial duality – of inside and outside, of self and other – which often work to naturalise the symbolic order of the city, reproducing social divisions and power relations. The operations of power are everywhere evident in space, for space is hierarchical – zoned, segregated, gated – and encodes both freedoms and restrictions – of mobility, of access, of vision – in the city (2000, 11).

These social divisions and the power relations are present in the way immigrant neighborhoods are seen not only by Anya in Waclawiak's novel, but also in the way the media and culture treat immigrants, which in turn relates to the notion of colonial power struggle, present also in the act of mimicry. Therefore, it can be argued that these power struggles in the surrounding society and space can have an impact on how an individual sees themselves in relation to the surrounding world, and Balshaw and Kennedy seem to agree with this belief:

Cities exhibit distinctive geographies of social differences and power relations, where space functions as a modality through which urban identities are formed. Major changes in urban forms are experienced differentially and sociospatial restucturings of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual identities are key features of modern and postmodern urbanism" (2000, 11).

Thus, they conclude, the city as a space of difference "is not simply a crucible of ethno-racial relations (the 'melting pot') or a multicultural smorgasbord (the 'urban mosaic'), but a site of intersubjective and collective encounters through which the formation of identity is

spatialised" (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000, 11).

Balshaw and Kennedy also note, that the "classical conception of the city as a space of difference has resonance in the twentieth century (Western) idealisations of urbanity as the very essence of city life" (2000, 12). They continue, that the concept of urbanity:

valorises the multifarious forms of social interaction and interdependence in the city – the erotic and aesthetic variety of street life, the close encounters strangers, the freedoms of access and movement in public spaces – positing these as the necessary conditions of democratic citizenship" (Balshaw and Kennedy 2000, 12).

Anya makes use of this freedom of city life by driving around and visiting places. However, she does not stick to just public spaces. One of the places she visits more than once is the Downtowner, a motel whose pool she uses without permission. When the desk clerk at the motel points to Anya that she is trespassing, Anya simply ignores him. Instead, she stays at the pool and meets a guest of the motel, a stranger whom she seeks out more than once in the novel. The stranger is a fire fighter who is helping with the forest fires in the area, and the discussion with the man reveals both Anya's and the stranger's attitudes about the city:

"Why would you live somewhere where there's fires, floods and mudslides all the time? Earthquakes."

He raised his hands up when he said earthquakes. Like it was so stupid he couldn't comprehend it.

"Those are the seasons here", I said. Holding out my hand and letting the ash crinkle into it.

I was getting defensive now.

"Are you really from Oklahoma?" I asked.

"Yeah".

"What's it like?" I asked

"It's flat."

"I used to think Los Angeles was flat. I believed it was flat," I said. I stared at the hills and felt foolish.

"I think everyone does at first," he said. "Then you get trapped here and you know better."

I stared up at the hills and thought about being trapped and if the mountain ranges around us made me feel caved in. With the ash falling faster, I thought about the mountains pushing us down and the fires doing the rest (2012, 124).

The idea that Los Angeles is like a trap, or a prison, is interesting, especially considering that

people from all over the world choose Los Angeles as their place to live. This would suggest, that despite being located in a challenging natural environment, there is something special in the city which draws people to it, something almost mythological that Waclawiak certainly makes use of in *How to Get into the Twin Palms*.

The fact that the novel is set to a time when the city is ravaged by forest fires does not seem coincidental either: it emphasizes the metaphor of the city as a prison, and offers Anya means to get rid of her past through symbolic rebirth. This symbolic rebirth occurs after Anya leaves the Twin Palms. She goes home and throws away the dress and the shoes she wore for the club, and changes "into things that needed to make sense to me again" (2012, 170). After this, Anya takes "any remnant of Lev" that she can find, puts them in a bag, and takes them with her in an attempt to burn them. She drives to a hill in order to have a better look of the blazing city: "I had been trawling the boulevards and avenues, the flats, and I needed to see things. Bright things". (2012, 170). Burning Lev's clothes and changing into her former clothes is a ritual she needs to do in order to finally abandon the idea of passing, and to return to her own Polish-American self.

In addition that, she also tries to help Mary let go of the past by burning down her house. After all, earlier in the novel Anya had been thinking of how lonely and unhappy Mary seemed: "I walked to my car and I knew she was crying in there. I felt her loneliness and wanted it. I wanted hers. I didn't want mine anymore" (2012, 109). A confirmation of Anya's actions is provided towards the end of the novel, when Anya thinks to herself: "I didn't tell her that I did this to her. Maybe I shouldn't have forced it on her. Maybe she was happy in her grief. After all, it was all she had left" (2012, 189). The novel then ends with Anya leaving Los Angeles, for "Los Angeles wasn't leaving and I couldn't make it go away" (2012, 190). In her words: "Instead, I would have to leave it because I had failed to cleanse the desert. The

city was resilient and unmoving, undaunted by the smoke clouding all around it, ash gently falling" (2012, 190). It seems, then, that Anya starts feeling about Los Angeles the same way as she does about herself: she cannot change who she is. But whether Anya finds a balance between her different cultural identities in another place, is a question left unanswered in the novel.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of Waclawiak's *How to Get into the Twin Palms* has shown that the novel deals with all the themes essential to works of immigrant fiction: hybridity, ambivalence, adjustment, abandonment and return (Pourjafari and Vahidpour 2014, 686-689). Anya appears to feel ambivalent about her hybrid cultural identity, for one minute she is trying to adapt to Polish culture, and the other into American culture. It appears, then, that Anya is caught in the liminal stage between identities, and is suffering from identity diffusion. The fact that she then starts looking up to the Russians shows that Anya wants to find a coherent cultural identity in order to escape this liminality, and thinks that ethnic impersonation can provide her a way to do that. But as it turns out, impersonation is not the answer to her identity problems, but instead just leaves her feeling more confused about who she is.

However, ethnic impersonation does seem to offer her a way to challenge the ongoing power struggle between the Polish and the Russians, as well as to abandon the expectations that both Polish and American cultures have placed on her. Her Polish mother, for example, expects Anya to behave like a good, religious Polish daughter, whereas the American society expects her to fully assimilate into the great melting pot. Therefore, her attempts to pass as a Russian through ethnic impersonation could be seen as an attempt to renounce these expectations altogether, as balancing between the demands of the two cultures has proved too difficult for her.

The colonial power struggle in the novel is present in the way the Polish and the Russians view each other, as well as in the way Anya observes the Russians in her neighborhood: she is stereotyping them, labeling them to the better and worse Russians, and denoting some more value than others. These observations are achieved through the process of cognitive mapping, in which Anya also takes note of how the different neighborhoods of

Los Angeles are constructed, and how immigration is present in these neighborhoods. The presence of colonial power struggle in the novel shows, that Anya's act of ethnic impersonation is also an act of mimicry. This, as stated before, is in accordance with Bhabha's claim, that mimicry is the affect of hybridity (1994, 172). According to Bhabha (1994, 122), "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other", and "thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power". Thus, it seems, Anya starts impersonating the Russians in order to gain power and a new, more coherent cultural identity.

But as it turns out, Anya fails in this attempt, and it seems that the freedom of choice offered by the urban space of Los Angeles only emphasizes her anxiety. The feeling that Los Angeles is, in fact, a prison becomes connected to Anya's decision to abandon passing. This abandonment, and the fact that Anya was only ever just *passing* and not imposturing a Russian, concurs with Bhabha's claim, that colonial mimicry is always incomplete, for "there are always cultural, historical, and racial differences which hinder one's complete transformation into something new" (Gupta 2012, 6-7). The fact that mimicry also makes her just more confused about her identity, is in accordance with Gupta's (2012, 5) claim, that mimicry is "an opportunistic method of copying the person in power", which "suppresses one's own cultural identity and leaves the person to an ambivalent and confused state".

Thus, *How to Get into the Twin Palms* shows, that one cannot escape their cultural identity through ethnic impersonation, for it is not the solution to the problems caused by bicultural identity. What is, is difficult to say, but I believe, that any attempts to try to understand the difficulties that immigrants face in terms of assimilation into a society are important, and that fictional settings can help us observe these difficulties in a fruitful way. In a world that is globalized and multicultural, it seems that one should be able to move fluidly

between many cultures, and hybridity as a theory might offer people the chance to not confine themselves to one fixed category. Therefore, instead of trying to fit into categories such as Polish, or American, or attempting to answer all the demands that both of these cultures place on her, Anya should instead accept that she is a mixture of both, and can only be Polish-American. This, according to Bhabha, is what hybridity is about: it is about "the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them" (Rutherford 1990, 216). Thus, by truly accepting the hybrid nature of her identity, Anya might finally be freed from the assumed or imposed hierarchies that surround her (Bhabha 1994, 5).

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